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SUBJECT: Six Bahraini Guantanamo Detainees Made Media Darlings

Ref (A): Manama 1553 Ref (B): Manama 1547

1. Summary: The plight of six Bahraini detainees at Guantanamo Bay detention facilities has consumed the Bahraini media for months, building tensions with a series of published reports alleging sexual humiliation and other abuses catalogued in the journal writings of one of the detainees, Juma Al-Dossari. On November 8, the Embassy issued a statement based on DoD guidance addressing some of the multitude of claims regarding Al-Dossari. The November 5 transfer to Bahrain of three of the detainees (Al-Dossari was not one of them) appears to have been well-received by the Bahraini public and opinion-leaders in the press, but accusations of abuse by Al-Dossari's lawyer and family continue to figure prominently, and a press conference by the three former detainees on November 17 highlighted allegations of torture and a possible lawsuit against the USG. Columnists continue to pose the question of "When will the other's come back?" and will do so for the foreseeable future. End Summary.

2. The issue of six Bahrainis in detention at Guantanamo Bay has been a rallying point for local critics of the U.S.-led Global War on Terror, and the attention has transformed the six detainees into folk heroes of a sort. The Government of Bahrain, under intense pressure from human rights groups, parliamentarians, and the Bahraini public, has faced sharp criticism for the continued incarceration of the "Bay 6". Negative commentary, like the following quote by Jaffar Al-Jamri, writing in the Arabic independent daily Al-Wasat, has been the norm. Al-Jamri criticized the government of Bahrain for "neglecting its detained sons in Guantanamo," adding, "Since the government forgot that it had sons there, who are being tortured day and night, it is the obligation of civil society institutions to push hard and put pressure locally and internationally to release all Bahraini detainees in Guantanamo."

3. Following the transfer of three detainees to Bahrain November 5, the Government of Bahrain competed with human rights groups and parliamentarians to take credit for convincing the USG to release them. The return occurred just weeks after a meeting between the Ambassador and the Bahrain Human Rights Watch regarding the detainees (Ref B). Both events were reflected positively in the press, but the honeymoon was short.

4. Headlines November 6 transformed the three ex-detainees into hometown heroes. The English government daily Bahrain Tribune ran a large photo of returned detainee Adel Kamel Haji surrounded by smiling young family members, with the headline "Home Sweet Home" and lead "The moment that all Bahrainis dreamed of, and which made it a truly joyous Eid for three families." In other reports, Haji reported that the Pakistani Army sold the six Bahraini detainees to the Americans for \$5,000 each. He pointed out that they were all arrested at the Pakistani borders and he was not accused of any crime during detention in Guantanamo. Other articles dwelled on the need for psychological rehabilitation following their "nightmare" at Guantanamo. Other articles following the release stressed that the three were released "as free men" after just a few hours of questioning by Bahraini prosecutors and were not charged with any crime.

5. In other reports, President of Al-Menbar Islamic Society Dr. Salah Ali welcomed the release of three Bahraini detainees from Guantanamo prison but said that the joy would be meaningless until the other three detainees were released.

6. Commentator Ahmed Kamal, in the pro-government Arabic daily Al-Ayam, writes: "The tragedy of the hundreds of detainees in Guantanamo, among them three Bahrainis, did not end with the release of the three Bahraini detainees. Guantanamo prison stands as a symbol of injustice and symbol of the American Administration arrogance. America claims that it is fighting terrorism, but practices it every day on our brothers in Guantanamo. This U.S. Administration is obsessed with control and hegemony."

7. After the release of the three former detainees, a series of articles chronicling alleged abuses of one detainee still

in detention continued unabated. In the two months prior to the release, Arabic daily Akhbar Al-Khaliij and its English sister paper Gulf Daily News printed a series of stories based on the journal writings of Juma Al-Dossari, in which it was alleged among many other things that Al-Dossari was offered sex for cooperation with interrogators, smeared with menstrual blood, forced to walk on broken glass, and fed bugs (Ref A). Soon afterwards, the Washington Post chronicled an eye-witness account by Al-Dossari's lawyer of a suicide attempt by his client. Court filings recently released (and published in the press) reported that Al-Dossari has made nine attempts on his own life, most recently on Nov. 15.

18. On November 7, Al-Dossari's family speculated in the press that Al-Dossari's alleged suicide attempt was staged by U.S. authorities who had actually intended to murder him. Khalid Al-Dossari, brother of Al-Dossari, told Al-Ayam, "My brother was subjected to a murder attempt and I hold the American Administration responsible for this." He alleged that Americans tried to kill Al-Dossari by slashing his arm and hanging him while his attorney was there to prove that it was a suicide attempt and that it happened in front of a witness.

19. In response, based on guidance provided by the Department of Defense, the Embassy issued the following press release:

Begin Nov 8 statement:

--Some media outlets in Bahrain have recently published several false allegations about the treatment of detainees at the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, including allegations regarding Juma Al-Dossari. The United States Government takes all allegations of abuse seriously. When a credible allegation of improper conduct surfaces, it is reviewed, and when factually warranted, investigated. As a result of the investigation, administrative, disciplinary, or judicial action is taken as appropriate. We have no evidence that substantiates that Mr. Al Dossari was the subject of any sexual humiliation at Guantanamo Bay.

--The U.S. Government does not generally comment on the specific medical circumstances of any particular detainee. However, detainees at Guantanamo are treated humanely and receive excellent medical care. Many detainees arrived at Guantanamo with pre-existing physical and mental health problems. Detention facilities at Guantanamo provide detainees access to mental health experts and take any threat of injury or suicide seriously.

--Allegations have been made that Al Dossari is being held in solitary confinement or isolation at Guantanamo. This is incorrect. Al Dossari interacts with other detainees during daily recreation and religious periods, and with U.S. personnel. Furthermore, he can send and receive mail and be visited by his attorney.

--There are no solitary confinement facilities at Guantanamo. While the conditions of detention at designated camps vary from communal to individual confinement, every detention facility at Guantanamo allows detainees the ability to communicate and pray with other detainees in their respective areas.

Media Reaction to Embassy Statement

10. In response to the U.S. Embassy statement on Guantanamo detainees published prominently in Bahraini print media, Council of Representatives Deputy Mohamed Khalid (Muslim Brotherhood) told the Arabic daily Akhbar Al-Khaliij on November 10 that "Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo prisons are full of sexual humiliations and lack humanitarian treatment." He condemned the Embassy statement and called on the Embassy to advise its Administration to improve its image in the world by shutting down Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo prisons, which are similar to Nazi prisons. "Only then the image of the American leadership would improve."

11. Writing in the Arabic pro-government daily Al-Ayam, commentator Mohamed Al-Uthman characterized the embassy statement on the alleged abuses as a "hallucination." He writes: "The U.S. Embassy thinks that we are stupid to believe its statement in which it claimed that the detainees received excellent medical care and were treated humanely. It seems that the Embassy forgot Amnesty International Reports and Human Rights Watch reports about torture in X-Ray camp." He adds: "Your Excellency Ambassador Monroe, I intended to send you a letter of appreciation and gratitude on your efforts to release the three detainees but you spoiled our appreciation letter by sending a statement like this. We hope that you reconsider the situation of the other three detainees and release them. Only this will give some credibility to the human rights reports that are issued in Washington DC every year. We will not forget your cooperation to release three of the six Bahraini detainees but another three remain: they are Juma Al-Dossari, Salah Al-Belooshi and Essa Al-Merbaty."

The Continuing Saga

12. On November 17, the three former detainees described in a press conference a number of alleged incidents at Guantanamo, including being made fun of by soldiers during their prayer activities, and one said he still had "the shoeprint of a soldier" on a page in his Quran. Media also reported the three planned to sue the USG for torture and humiliation suffered at Guantanamo, but the next day a family member of one detainee called this report inaccurate.

13. In press reports November 17, remaining detainees' lawyers described their clients' deteriorating physical condition from hunger strikes, and Al-Dossari's apparent self-inflicted condition. According to these reports, at the last attorney-client meeting Al-Dossari appeared "in a wheel chair wearing a neck brace", that he was unable to stand, and appeared to be in agony with injuries on his face and hand. Al-Wasat reported that a Bahraini delegation headed by MPs Mohammed Khalid and Nabeel Rajab and families of the remaining detainees would participate in a November 19 London Conference entitled "The Global Struggle Against Torture" organized by Amnesty International. At the Conference, Amnesty called on the U.S. to allow the UN officials unfettered access to detainees at Guantanamo, also covered widely in the press.

14. COMMENT: The guidance received on the Al-Dossari case was most useful in helping to counter the steady drumbeat of allegations on the Bahrain detainees. This drumbeat will continue as the three returned detainees speak out at home and the three remaining detainees talk to their lawyers. The allegations inevitably are regarded as fact by many. The Ambassador, and the Embassy more generally, will continue to seek opportunities to counter these negative allegations, and we welcome further points to buttress our arguments in the coming weeks and months.

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